

On Thursday evening, President Barack Obama gave his first speech to a joint session of Congress, replacing the State of Union Address. U.S. Representative Debbie Halvorson (IL 11th District) has issued the following response:

"Tonight President Obama presented a clear and concise vision of what our country must do to restore economic prosperity for all Americans. He focused on three areas that are absolutely critical to our economic future - energy, healthcare and education.

"While he was honest and direct in defining the significant challenges we face as a Nation, he made it abundantly clear that if we work together as Americans, our ability to prevail against the odds is strong.

"I wholeheartedly agree with the President, that despite the challenges we face, we are capable of turning the economy around and securing a better future for generations to come. History has shown that the tenacity and strength of the American people have brought them through some very difficult times... I see this strength in my District - and throughout the United States. I believe as he does, that we can make it through these tough times- We are not quitters - We all want this country to succeed.

"This is not to negate the challenges before us. Unemployment continues to grow with almost 600,000 Americans laid off just last month. Homeowners are unable to refinance their homes because property values have dropped. Students, car buyers and businesses are finding it more and more difficult to secure credit. It is evident that our economy is in dire straights - and it didn't happen over night. But we do know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. It's happened before.

"It was only eight years ago, when the Bush administration took office with a projected \$5 trillion surplus. Unfortunately, the same administration left us with massive budget deficits and a \$3 trillion price tag for the Iraq war. It's clear we're not going to undo these mistakes and failed policies overnight, but I believe it can be done.

"The work of President Obama and this new Congress has just begun. In less than two months,

we've already accomplished some great things, including the economic recovery package. This is the first step towards a better economy and is a critical down payment on investments in health care, energy and education that will save our nation billions in years to come.

"I am pleased to see the President recognizes that our fiscal situation is unsustainable, and that we must create a new culture of responsibility. The economic recovery package is working to address a very immediate concern, but there is more to do in order to resume our fiscal stability to where we were at eight years ago.

"Turning our economy around is one of the best ways we can address this budget deficit. Working together in bi-partisan fashion is important as well. I see how collaborative efforts work successfully at a District level and look forward to doing the same with President Obama and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. Together we can and will find solutions to our common problems and secure prosperity for generations to come."